

The laws of happiness

By Sgt. Edward Eagerton

CAMP DENALI, Alaska— It can be said that the real measure of a person's worth is not by material gain, but by the drive to accomplish his or her dreams regardless of the reward. This is further accentuated when faced with obstacles – the kind we all face in life – and overcoming them to achieve these goals.

For one Alaska Army National Guardsman, her dream was to graduate from law school and pass the Bar Exam. Some of the challenges she faced were a busy schedule as a full-time student, wife, and mother of two children, serving in the U.S. Army Reserves and working part-time.

"I had to balance still being a mom and finding time to be with my kids, but then also having enough time to read all of the case law and prepare the case briefs I needed for class the next day," said Sgt. Lindsay Chvilicek, now a signal intelligence analyst with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade. "I learned how to survive on very little sleep."

Chvilicek first became interested in going to law school when she worked as a legal secretary at a law office. Originally, she had considered going to graduate school for pharmacy.

"Once I worked in the law firm, I realized how much I loved the law," she said. "That's when I decided to pursue a law degree."

In 2009, Chvilicek was living in Idaho when she took the Law School Admission Test and subsequently applied to two different law schools. Four days before the semester started, she was accepted into the University of Montana School of Law and had little time to move to Missoula, Mont. At the time, her youngest child was eight and a half months old.

During her third semester at the University of Montana School of Law, Chvilicek gave birth to her third child. Nine days later, she returned to class to finish the semester and take her finals.

"It was a perfectly acceptable reason to defer my finals," she said, "but I wanted to get them done. I felt like I didn't have a choice. Would I have loved to take six to eight weeks off and stay home with my newborn daughter? Of course, but I needed to graduate with my class."

"I would have major assignments due Monday after a drill weekend," explained Chvilicek. "After drill, I would have to go right into homework for five to seven hours."

It was the flexibility of her unit, she said, that allowed her to pursue her degree by working with her to reschedule drill dates when her studies required more of her time.

"It's really important that if units want their Soldiers to actively pursue the educational benefits that are available to them, they need to understand that flexibility is required for them to be able to complete their assignments," she added.

In 2012, Chvilicek graduated from law school on schedule. She returned to Alaska in early 2013, after having lived there before when her husband was stationed at Fort Richardson while serving in the active-duty Army. Once in Alaska, she joined the Alaska Army National Guard and was hired full-time as a dual-status federal technician for the Purchasing and Contracting Division of the U.S. Property and Fiscal Office.

While working for the USPFO, Chvilicek tested for the Bar Exam in July. In October, she found out that she passed the exam and was now certified to practice both state and federal law in the state of Alaska. Despite this, she plans to keep her current job.

"On the civilian side, I am a contract specialist for the Guard, and I really love my job," she said. "I would only leave for the right job. I would most likely make more money, but not all money is good money, so I think me being happy has a lot of value to it, and that's why I'm still here."

Her future goals, she said, include commissioning as an officer in the Judge Advocate General corps, which is the legal branch of the military.

"You need to prioritize what is going to make you happy," she said. "Just because you're going to make a lot of money doesn't mean you're going to be happy. Find something that you enjoy, that you get up in the morning and look forward to. That will make your quality of life so much better."

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